

Language learning motivation of students from a special educational school in Hong Kong

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Special educational needs (SEN) have attracted considerable attention in education and educational research. Nevertheless, limited research attention has been given to the second language (L2) learning of students with SEN in special schools and even less to their L2 learning motivation (LLM), despite the significant role of LLM in L2 learning success. This paper compares LLM data gathered from 66, grade 7-10, students with SEN in a special school and 66, grade 7-10, non-SEN students from mainstream schools in Hong Kong. Findings from a motivational questionnaire reveal higher levels of LLM among the special school students (SSS) than the mainstream school students (MSS). One-way MANOVA and Cohen's *d*, show students from the special school have significantly higher *ought-to L2 self* and English learning attitude yet significantly lower required orientation than their mainstream school peers. Regression analysis has allowed the investigation of factors interacting with LLM among SSS and MSS, suggesting that self-efficacy and parental influence are significant predictors of the LLM for both groups.

Key words: language learning motivation; second language; self-efficacy; parental influence; special school; special educational needs; Hong Kong

Introduction

Second language learning motivation (LLM) is paramount for language learning achievement across varied contexts (Bernaus & Gardner, 2008; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013). Extant LLM studies have significantly contributed to the understanding of language learners in mainstream settings accommodating mainly typically developing students, however, no empirical study appears to have specifically examined the LLM of students in special schools. The present study addresses this important gap.

Based on a large-scale motivational project in Hong Kong (see Hennebry & Gao, 2018), this paper examines the LLM of special school students (SSS) in comparison with that of mainstream school students (MSS) focusing on their L2 selves, self-perceived sociocultural motives (including parental support/encouragement and academic requirement) and the key cognitive traits of self-efficacy and coping. First, the educational context of the special schools in Hong Kong is introduced, followed by a review of L2 learning characteristics of students with SEN. Next, relevant studies and theories that constitute the conceptual framework of the present study will be outlined. Last, research procedures, explorations and discussions of LLM will be presented.

Background of the study

The special schools

In line with formal recognition of SEN prompted by the UK Education Act of 1981, education sectors across contexts have witnessed the promotion and expansion of inclusive education approaches and systems (Garner, 2009). While Hong Kong has been no exception to this trend, there remain sixty-one special schools that cater exclusively to students with SEN (Education Bureau, 2017b) and two other types of special schools which are “funded under the Code of Aid for Special Schools, including Skills Opportunity Schools (SOS) and Practical Schools” (Poon-McBrayer, 2002, p. 28). The special school participating in this study is an SOS which has been set up to cater for the needs of students with severe learning difficulties (Education Bureau, 2014) and accommodates students with diverse SEN (Education Bureau, 2017a). The school achieved mainstreaming, as advised by the Hong Kong Education Bureau (2014), by integrating the mainstream school curriculum into its existing curriculum (Education Bureau, 2018) including the requirement for English as a compulsory subject for all students (Education Bureau, 2014). The main differences in curriculum structure between the SOS and local mainstream schools are the SOS’s adapted curricula and practical courses (e.g., catering services) to meet the needs of students with diverse SEN (Education Bureau, 2014). The SOS has emphasized on their website¹ that challenging tasks and public exams will be provided to higher ability students, which indicates they are not a necessity for all students.

L2 learning among students with SEN

A large proportion of SEN studies in L2 learning are interventional studies conducted among students with learning difficulties (LD) who are understood to be students with SEN due to specific learning difficulties in language learning such as dyslexia. Since the 1980s, Ganschow and Sparks have conducted pioneering research into the nature of the difficulties facing these students particularly in relation to L2 acquisition. Reviewing studies from 1980 to 2003, Sparks and his colleagues (see Sparks, 2001; Sparks, Ganschow, & Pohlman, 1989; Sparks, Philips, & Javorsky, 2003) proposed a linguistic coding differences hypothesis, speculating that problems with basic pronunciation or spelling skills tend to negatively affect both native language and L2 learning. Interventional studies have sought to contribute to the development of pedagogical strategies for supporting L2 learning among SEN and particularly LD students (for example, Berkeley, Mastropieri, & Scruggs, 2011; Klingner & Vaughn, 1996; Orosco & O’Connor, 2014; Rubin, 2016). Such studies have often yielded positive results in terms of pre- and post- tests, yet despite the important predictive role of LLM in L2 learning success, none has examined this variable.

LLM

The field of LLM is theoretically mature, having built extensively on Gardner’s integrative/instrumental system that generates the social psychological model (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013). Extension of Gardner’s work has seen the emergence of two principal motivational models that have largely dominated the field, namely Dörnyei’s (2005, 2009) L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) and Gardner’s socio-educational model (2010). The two models overlap on key constructs, but also bring different perspectives on LLM. The socio-educational model emphasizes the cultural and educational context and postulates a model of motivation comprising six key constructs, namely

“integrativeness, attitudes toward the learning situation, motivation, instrumentality, language anxiety and integrative motivation” (Gardner, 2010, p. 87). The L2MSS draws on possible selves theory (Markus & Kunda, 1986) and self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987), emphasizing the concept of the self. Within this model, the selves are comprised of the self-perceived L2 learning experience, ought-to L2 self and ideal L2 self (for details, see You & Dörnyei, 2016). Both models have proposed key clusters that might incorporate or mediate other motivational orientations. This study adopted the L2MSS framework to compare the L2 selves of SSS and MSS, and to investigate the extent to which the selected sociocultural factors and the two key cognitive factors contribute to the prediction of possible L2 selves.

Using Dörnyei’s (2005) L2MSS framework, Kormos and Csizér (2010) found dyslexic students had significantly lower LLM than their non-dyslexic peers, postulating that the lower L2 selves and lower self-efficacy among dyslexic learners were due to the difficulties of language learning. Other extant studies consist of anecdotal reports from researchers, indicating SEN learners have a lower LLM due to challenges they face in language learning (for example, Melekoglu, 2011). However, because motivation plays a key role in L2 learning, it is critical to examine SEN students’ LLM through systematic empirical evidence rather than anecdotal reports.

Self-perceived sociocultural motives

Within the sociocultural motivational scale, this study examines family influence and the notion of *required orientation* which Ng (2003) defines as meeting certain academic requirements as a way of achieving social recognition and bringing honour to the family. Characterized by an achievement-oriented educational atmosphere, Hong Kong schools strongly emphasize students’ academic achievement, and students in turn might manifest a strong required orientation. Chinese parents tend to exert a strong influence on children’s perception of academic achievement (Bai, Chao, & Wang, 2019). Other LLM studies have further pointed to the possible relevance of a required orientation in Asian contexts (Chen, Warden, & Chang, 2005).

Language learning self-efficacy and coping strategies

Self-efficacy is understood to mean “personal judgements of one’s capabilities to organize and execute courses of action to attain designated goals” (Bandura, as cited in Zimmerman, 2000, p. 84). In academic learning, positive self-efficacy beliefs are regarded as essential in dealing with challenging or new tasks (Bandura, 2006), because self-efficacy contributes to sustained efforts and motivation on a task and consequently to attainment (Job & Klassen, 2012). Researchers hypothesize that as a result of experiencing ongoing difficulties in academic tasks, SEN students tend to exhibit lower perceived self-efficacy (for example, Zisimopoulos & Galanaki, 2009). Empirical evidence also points to lower general academic self-efficacy among SEN students than among non-SEN students (Hen & Goroshit, 2014). However, according to Bandura (1997) and Zimmerman (2000), self-efficacy is task-specified and sensitive to variations in situational context. Students’ academic self-efficacy may vary across learning subjects (Lent, Brown, & Gore, 1997). For instance, a student may perceive a weak self-efficacy in science but a strong self-efficacy in L2 learning. To understand the L2 learning of SEN students, it is necessary to explore their L2 self-efficacy rather than general learning self-efficacy.

Associated with self-efficacy are the learners' coping strategies for dealing with academic difficulties or stress (Meltzer, Katzir, Miller, Reddy, & Roditi, 2004). SEN students' academic difficulties are often due to a lack of metacognitive strategies for planning, monitoring and evaluating their behaviour (Job & Klassen, 2012). When compared to their non-SEN peers, SEN students often use simpler, less effective strategies (Mason, 2004). Exploring coping strategies of SEN students, Heiman and Kariv (2004) found that they tended to use social-emotional strategies (e.g., sharing feelings with others) more often than non-SEN students, to cope with their academic difficulties. The ability to implement appropriate and effective coping strategies can be an important factor in enabling SEN students to overcome the challenges they face, thus promoting and enhancing their L2 learning self-efficacy. In light of this, SEN students' coping strategies and the extent to which they interact with LLM are also examined in the study.

Research questions

Extant literature on motivation or L2 learning among SEN students has tended to compare SEN to non-SEN students. Such studies have typically found SEN students to display less academic motivation and self-efficacy and fewer coping strategies and have attributed this to the challenges facing SEN L2 learners. The current study extends existing studies by comparing the LLM of SEN special school students (SSS) and non-SEN mainstream school students (MSS) in relation to three specific research questions:

1. Do SSS differ significantly from MSS in LLM in the context of Hong Kong?
2. What is the nature of the relationship between LLM, self-perceived sociocultural motives, language learning self-efficacy and coping strategies among SSS and MSS?
3. To what extent do self-perceived sociocultural motives, language learning self-efficacy and coping strategies contribute to the prediction of possible L2 selves among SSS and MSS?

Materials and methods

Design

This study adopts a quantitative research method. A quantitative survey was administered to the SSS and MSS participants at the beginning of the 2016/17 academic year. Data were collected and analysed to compare the LLM of the two groups. The essence of this comparison is to explore whether SSS students differ significantly from their MSS peers in LLM in the context of Hong Kong (RQ1). A one-way MANOVA and Cohen's *d* was employed to investigate RQ1. To investigate RQ2, Pearson's correlation was conducted to examine the interplays among L2 selves, sociocultural motives, self-efficacy and coping strategies. Finally, a multiple regression analysis was conducted on the LLM of SSS to further explore the factors affecting the L2 selves of SSS.

Participants

The participants were selected from a large-scale motivational project in Hong Kong (see Hennebry & Gao, 2018) containing 3,578 Grade 7-10 students. Among the 3,578 students, 66 students with SEN (hereafter SSS) were studying in a special school while the remaining 3,512 typically developing students (hereafter MSS) were studying in local mainstream schools. To generate a valid comparison group, a representative sample ($n =$

66) from the 3,512 mainstream school students was selected through random sample modelling in SPSS to capture the characteristics (e.g., mean, standard deviation and sex) of the whole MSS sample. The 2-group comparative study therefore examines 66 SSS and 66 randomly selected MSS participants.

The 66 SSS comprise 36 seventh graders, 11 eighth graders and 19 ninth graders, identified with learning difficulties due to specific learning difficulty, intellectual disability, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, and autism spectrum disorders according to their school profile. The allocation of SSS to English language lessons is based on their English proficiency rather than their SEN types thus potentially generating diverse educational needs in each language classroom. There was a gender imbalance among the SSS (40 boys, 20 girls and 6 students did not report their gender). The SSS students self-reported that 71.4% used English mainly in English classes and 57.6% students reported not using English at home, suggesting that the English classroom is the primary context for SSS students to learn and use English. The SSS participants' self-reported English language proficiency is fairly equally distributed, between excellent (16.7%), very good (20.0%), good (21.7%), fair (20.0%) and poor (21.7%).

The 66 MSS participants have a relatively similar gender balance (40 boys and 26 girls). They also predominantly report using English only in class. Their self-reported language proficiency is not as equally distributed as their SSS counter-parts: excellent (1.5%), very good (10.8%), good (44.6%), fair (36.9%) and poor (6.2%).

Measures

Generated through back-translation approach, a bilingual motivational survey (Hennebry & Gao, 2018) in English and Chinese was piloted across 3 Hong Kong mainstream secondary schools. Principal component analysis on the pilot findings in 3 mainstream schools resulted in deletion of items that had lower reliability and seemed confusing to the students, generating the motivation survey for the main study. The content of the survey is the same for both SSS and MSS, except that the SSS used a Chinese only version of the survey (because of their English teachers' concerns about those students' variable English proficiency). The survey contains 38 4-point Likert items with responses ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (4). The items relate to the following four dimensions:

1. LLM: Students' L2 selves are examined using items from Dörnyei and Taguchi (2010) to look at the ideal L2 self, the ought-to L2 self and the L2 learning experience.
2. Sociocultural motive on English learning: Parental influence and required orientation (of academic achievement) are assessed with items adapted from Dörnyei and Taguchi (2010) and Chen et al. (2005), respectively.
3. Language learning self-efficacy: This section comprises twelve items drawn from Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels (1994), Guilloteaux and Dörnyei (2008) and Wang, Kim, Bai, and Hu (2014). Average scores across the 12 items are computed to create a language learning self-efficacy variable.
4. Coping strategies: 7 items related to language learning coping strategies are extracted from Struthers, Perry, and Menec (2000). By computing average scores of these items, a coping strategy scale is generated.

Examples of the survey items used are shown in Table 1. The reliability of all items was demonstrated using Cronbach alpha (see Table 2).

Table 1. Examples of survey items for each dimension

Dimensions	Total items	Example items
1. Language learning motivation		
• Ideal L2 self	4	I can imagine myself speaking English with international friends.
• Ought-to L2 self	4	I want to please my parents/relatives.
• L2 Learning experience	3	I like the atmosphere of my English classes.
2. Perceived sociocultural motives		
• Parental influence	5	My family put a lot of pressure on me to study English.
• Required orientation of academic achievement	3	I need English skills to help me pass required classes (e.g., English language, Maths and Liberal Studies).
3. Self-efficacy	12	If make more effort, I am sure I will be able to master English.
4. Coping Strategies	7	I think about how I might best handle English learning problems.

Table 2. Reliability and descriptive statistics of the survey of SSS ($n = 66$) and MSS ($n = 66$)

Dimensions	<i>M</i>	SSS <i>SD</i>	α	<i>M</i>	MSS <i>SD</i>	α	No. of items
1. Language learning motivation							
• Ideal L2 self	2.95	0.86	.90	2.87	0.71	.83	4
• Ought-to L2 self	3.04*	0.78	.82	2.78	0.68	.81	4
• L2 learning experience	3.06*	0.85	.88	2.66	0.73	.84	3
2. Perceived sociocultural motives							
• Parental influence	2.76*	0.81	.85	2.41	0.64	.73	5
• Required orientation of academic achievement	2.81*	0.97	.88	3.32	0.64	.91	3
3. Self-efficacy	2.98	0.78	.94	2.90	0.43	.81	12
4. Coping strategies	3.04	0.85	.87	2.95	0.52	.85	7

Notes. *The p value is less than .05, M = mean, SD = standard deviation, α = Cronbach α

Data collection

The survey was administered during regular school hours at the beginning of the 2016–2017 academic year, lasting approximately 30 minutes. Instructions were clearly explained to the students in their first language. To avoid the potential effects on survey results of attention deficits and dyslexia, each item of the survey was read aloud twice by class teachers for SSS participants. The paper questionnaires were collected and the data manually entered into SPSS 24.0 by two research assistants. A few missing items (in under 0.5% of cases) have been replaced by series mean at grade level (Little & Rubin, 2014).

Data analysis

Descriptive analysis was conducted on the survey data of both groups to generate an overview of students' LLM. A subsequent one-way MANOVA allowed comparison between the SSS and MSS students across the affective variables. Cohen's d was calculated to enable understanding of the magnitude of the differences between the SSS and MSS populations, where d values are distinguished as big ($d=.8$), middle ($d=.5$) and small ($d=.2$) (based on Cohen, as cited in Fritz, Morris, & Richler, 2012). Next, correlational analysis was used to examine the relationship between L2 selves and sociocultural motives, self-efficacy and coping strategies. Finally, to predict ought-to L2 self and ideal L2 self, English learning self-efficacy, coping strategies, required orientation and parental influence were entered at their means with a stepwise multiple regression method, given that previous research shows no conclusive results regarding the effects of these four variables on L2 selves of students with SEN.

Results***Descriptive statistics and one-way MANOVA results between SSS and MSS***

The first research question explores the difference between SSS and MSS participants' motivation to learn English as a second language. Comparing the SSS and MSS group on the scale of LLM, descriptive statistics reveal SSS score higher in all 3 subscales of LLM (Table 2). The results of a one-way MANOVA using Pillai's trace, show a significant effect of the school setting and SSS status on LLM [Pillai's Trace = .086, $F(1,130) = 4.77$, $p < .05$, partial eta squared (η_p^2) = .035]. The detailed univariate ANOVA results and Cohen's d on the two groups show that SSS score significantly higher on the actual English learning experience [$F(1,130) = 8.29$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .060$; $d = .50$], and significantly higher on ought-to L2 self [$F(1,130) = 3.99$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .030$; $d = .36$]. Whereas, no statistical significance is found on the ideal L2 self between the 2 groups.

In terms of sociocultural motives, descriptive statistics reveal that SSS score lower in required orientation, yet higher in parental influence (Table 2). The detailed univariate ANOVA results and Cohen's d show that SSS scored significantly lower than MSS on required orientation [$F(1,130) = 13.1$, $p < .0005$, $\eta_p^2 = .092$; $d = .62$], yet significantly higher on parental influence [$F(1,130) = 7.76$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .056$; $d = .48$]. Regarding self-efficacy and coping strategy, SSS score slightly higher in both scales than MSS (Table 2), although ANOVA and Cohen's d results show that these differences are not significant: self-efficacy [$F(1,130) = 0.62$, $p > .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .005$; $d = .11$]; coping strategy [$F(1,130) = 0.46$, $p > .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .003$; $d = .13$].

Correlational results between SSS and MSS students

Research question 2 investigates the relationship between participants' LLM, sociocultural motives, self-efficacy and coping strategies. The aggregate score for LLM is highly positively correlated with self-efficacy, coping strategy, parental influence, and required orientation among all participants (Table 3). For both groups, the highest correlation is between LLM and self-efficacy, with Pearson's $r = .917$, $p < .001$ among SSS, and Pearson's $r = .691$, $p < .001$ among MSS. Correlation between LLM and parental influence is much higher among SSS than MSS.

Table 3. Pearson correlation results

	Pearson correlations among SSS ($n = 66$)				Pearson correlations among MSS ($n = 66$)			
	Parental influence	Required orientation	Self-efficacy	Coping Strategy	Parental influence	Required orientation	Self-efficacy	Coping Strategy
LLM	.731	.731	.917	.829	.326	.388	.691	.561

Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Regression analysis results

The third research question looks at the extent to which self-efficacy, coping strategy, parental influence and required orientation contribute to predicting possible L2 selves (ideal L2 self and ought-to L2 self) among students in the special and mainstream schools.

Applying a stepwise regression method three times on SSS and MSS, three comparative models were generated (the relevant data are displayed in Tables 4a, 4b and 4c where only significant predictors are displayed). Model 1 shows that self-efficacy and parental influence contributed significantly to the conglomerate score of LLM (including ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self and actual L2 learning experience) on both groups, while coping strategy and required orientation added little predictive power (Table 4a). Model 2 shows that only self-efficacy significantly predicted both SSS and MSS group's ideal L2 self (Table 4b). The third model shows that only parental influence contributed significantly to both groups' ought-to L2 self (Table 4c).

Table 4a. Summary for variables predicting LLM of SSS ($n = 66$) and MSS ($n = 66$)

Variable	First model on SSS			First model on MSS		
	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β
Self-efficacy	.727	.109	.765***	.685	.166	.559***
Parental influence	.156	.065	.169*	.198	.071	.242**
R^2		.856***			.548***	
F for change in R^2		90.73***			18.488***	

Notes: B = unstandardized beta; SE B = the standard error for the unstandardized beta; β = standardized beta; ***The p value is less than 0.0005; **The p value is less than 0.01; *The p value is less than 0.05

Table 4b. Summary of variables predicting the ideal L2 self of SSS ($n = 66$) and MSS ($n = 66$)

Variable	Second model on SSS			Second model on MSS		
	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	B
Self-efficacy	.796	.184	.722***	1.200	.253	.722***
R^2		.695***			.428***	
F for change in R^2		34.777***			11.422***	

Notes: B = unstandardized beta; SE B = the standard error for the unstandardized beta;
 β = standardized beta; ***The p value is less than 0.0005

Table 4c. Summary of the stepwise multiple regression analysis for variables predicting the Ought-to L2 self of SSS ($n = 66$) and MSS ($n = 66$) group.

Variable	Third model on SSS			Third model on MSS		
	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β
Parental influence	.388	.095	.403***	.575	.105	.541***
R^2		.701***			.410***	
F for change in R^2		39.079***			10.577***	

Notes: B = unstandardized beta; SE B = the standard error for the unstandardized beta; β = standardized beta; ***The p value is less than 0.0005

Discussion

The focus of the current study is on the LLM, perceived parental influence and academic requirement, self-efficacy and coping strategies of SSS because there is little evidence in the literature for this particular population. The initial descriptive statistics in this study reveal that SSS do not exhibit lower LLM, self-efficacy and coping strategies than MSS. This refutes the claims of previous studies that SEN students tend to demonstrate lower motivation, self-efficacy and coping strategies in learning (for example, Kormos & Csizér, 2010; Melekoglu, 2011; Sparks, 2001; Zisimopoulos & Galanaki, 2009). This discussion first targets the differences and similarities seen in the data in levels of LLM, self-efficacy, coping, family influence, and required orientation between SSS and MSS. Then, it discusses whether factors associating with LLM are the same among SSS and MSS and why self-efficacy is high among SSS and strongly correlates with their LLM. Last, it aims to explain the predictive power for possible L2 selves of sociocultural motives for SSS and cognitive traits for MSS.

The L2 motivational profile of students in the special school

The descriptive statistics display similarities and differences between SSS and MSS, with a generally positive L2 motivation pattern among both groups. All participants were similar in their clear future L2 self-concept (e.g., they imagined themselves using English with colleagues, friends or people from L2 communities in the future). This can be explained by the social economic environment of Hong Kong. Hong Kong is dependent

on international trade and serves as a bridge between mainland China and the west. English is a requirement for any good job and for education (see, for example, Bai et al., 2019), thus offering sources for a clear ideal L2 self. Next, effort was prevalently perceived as important in terms of L2 learning efficacy and coping. Participants were able to see themselves as successful English users in the future, and attributed this to endeavour, which can be reflected in the mean scale of self-efficacy (e.g., “If make more effort, I am sure I will be able to master English”). Participants also showed strong willingness to handle English learning challenges, either by turning to other people for help or deciding to put more effort into English learning. In Asian society, effort has traditionally been understood as essential to academic achievement and learners tend to attribute their learning challenges to lack of effort rather than ability (Sue & Okazaki, 1990), which might serve to protect students’ self-efficacy, particularly students with SEN who constantly face challenges in L2 learning.

In terms of differences, the study finds SSS display significantly lower required orientation than MSS, which is partially explained by the difference of educational setting between the two types of schools. The special school provides an adapted curricula to cater to diverse SEN needs and does not emphasise academic achievement. In Hong Kong mainstream schools, conversely, education is competitive and achievement-oriented. Such schools tend to emphasize strongly academic performance (Bai et al., 2019), which in turn might enhance students’ required orientation in mainstream setting. Nevertheless, the lower required orientation of academic achievement in SSS does not lead to a lower ought-to L2 self in that group. In fact, their ought-to L2 self is significantly higher than that of the MSS group, which can be explained as a result of parental influence.

LLM, self-efficacy and coping strategy

The findings show that LLM strongly correlates with language learning self-efficacy, coping strategies, parental influence and required orientation for both groups of participants. The discussion here will focus on the interplay between LLM and the two most strongly correlated factors (language learning self-efficacy and coping strategies) among the SSS (readers may wish to know that the literature has validated strong associations between self-efficacy and learning motivation among MSS, see for example, Zimmerman, 2000). There is a commonly held belief that SEN students tend to have lower self-efficacy than their non-SEN peers due to persistent L2 learning difficulties or constant academic failures (for example, Hen & Goroshit, 2014; Zisimopoulos & Galanaki, 2009). The data refutes this assumption showing instead that SSS scored higher, though not significantly, than MSS on self-efficacy measures. This suggests that SEN students’ self-efficacy is not directly related to academic challenges, although latent regulating factors might exist between self-efficacy and academic challenges. Associated with self-efficacy are learners’ coping strategies for dealing with academic difficulties or stress (Meltzer et al., 2004). In the present study, SSS exhibited high self-reported coping strategies, serving as an important factor enabling them to overcome the challenges they faced. Coping strategies might, therefore, act as a regulating factor between self-efficacy and academic challenges. Though Mason (2004) reported SEN students often use simpler, less effective strategies than their peers and Heiman and Kariv (2004) found that SEN students tended to sharing feelings with others more often than non-SEN students to cope with their academic difficulties, the current research showed no relevant concrete evidence of those traits.

The predictive power of self-efficacy and parental influence on possible L2 selves

A major finding of this study, achieved through multiple regression, shows that self-efficacy and parental influence contributed significantly to the L2 motivation of SSS and MSS, while required orientation and coping strategy did not. This finding suggests that building students' self-efficacy and encouraging parents' involvement on students' L2 learning would be particularly helpful for teaching both groups of students. Specifically, the ideal L2 self was significantly predicted by self-efficacy among SSS and MSS. You and Dörnyei (2016) highlighted the term *image*, postulating that the ideal L2 self centres on one's image of the kind of L2 user one would like to become. The data of the current study shows instead that one's ideal L2 self primarily relates to one's self-efficacy, which according to Bandura (1997) and Zimmerman (2000) refers to one's judgements on the capabilities to master the L2 through necessary actions. Ought-to L2 self, on the other hand, is significantly predicted by parental influence, echoing past studies (for example, Spann, Kohler, & Soenksen, 2003) on the importance of parental involvement and influence on SSS and MSS. The sense of obligation to meet parents' expectations in academic or work settings is prevalent in Chinese society (Magid, 2009). Ought-to L2 self (e.g., Learning English to please parents/relatives) captures the notion that meeting certain academic requirements (e.g., exam grading) or avoiding negative consequences of not doing so is integral to reaching connectedness with others.

Limitations

The focal sample in the present study is small and restricted to one special school, and consists of students with diverse special educational needs rather than a specific SEN type. This enables the research to address a general motivational landscape of SEN students but may obscure influences from specific special educational needs. Future studies which are able to identify the individual educational needs of participants would provide a more fine-grained understanding of the interactions between the specific experiences of SEN students and their L2 motivation population.

Conclusion

This study shows that among both SSS and MSS students the most important predictor for ideal L2 self is self-efficacy while the most important predictor for ought-to L2 self is parental influence. Thus, like their mainstream counterparts, self-efficacy and parental influences are paramount in shaping the L2 selves of special school students. Both groups regard equally the necessity of endeavour in coping challenges in L2 learning and building self-efficacy. Special school students display significantly higher ought-to L2 self while display significantly lower required orientation than mainstream students.. The low level of required orientation among SSS are likely to be caused by the school setting, where the requirement on academic achievement is small. The significantly high ought-to L2 self of SSS reflects they have received much more parental influence than their peers from the mainstream school settings.

The study indicates that in terms of L2 motivation the special school students are not necessarily disadvantaged if their school adjusts the test and learning contents to the nature of learners' special educational needs and gets parents positively involved in their children's L2 learning. Considering the significant predictive power of self-efficacy and parental influence on LLM, it is of great relevance for parents to cooperate with teachers to generate, protect and maintain students' self-efficacy, particularly regarding the support for SEN students who face constant challenges in L2 learning. Although our

research findings might be generalizable for Hong Kong secondary special school settings and perhaps might outline trends in regions where English is learned as a second language, the findings might not be transferable to students with SEN in inclusive educational setting.

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Notes

1. The website is not referenced here to preserve the anonymity of the school.

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